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NEWS

The Price We Pay for the Loss of Local News

TARA HUGHES | STAFF WRITER

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By Tara Hughes

August 9, 2023. The Washington Post's slogan is "Democracy Dies i Darkness". While it may sound extreme, there is data to back it u loss of local journalism has been accompanied by the malignant spread of

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misinformation and disinformation, political polarization, eroding trust in media, and a yawning digital and economic divide among citizens. In communities without a credible source of local news, voter participation declines, corruption in both government and business increases, and local residents end up paying more in taxes and at checkout," says Penelope Abernathy in her The State of Local News, 2022 Report. In the report she also states that, "Since 2005, the country has lost more than a fourth of its newspapers (2,500) and is on track to lose a third by 2025." She further states, "This is a crisis for our democracy and our society."

In Democracy Without Journalism, University of Pennsylvania professor Victor Pickard writes, "It is through local journalism that communities stay connected to and informed about what is happening in their backyards - especially in their schools, their governments, and other critical institutions and infrastructures. They rely on local news to find out about the quality of their environment - whether their air and water are safe - and who is running for local office and why. Yet it is precisely this kind of journalism that is quickly disappearing. If we as a society want to encourage this sort of reporting, we must find ways to support it."

Voter turnout and civic engagement also suffer without local news. In a 2015 paper titled, "As Local News Goes, So Goes Citizen Engagement: Media, Knowledge, and Participation in US House Elections," studying the relationship between news data and citizen responses to a survey looking at 2010 U.S. House midterm elections they found people in districts with less coverage were less likely to vote and share opinions about the candidates.

In Penelope Abernathy's paper News Deserts and Ghost Newspapers: Will Local News Survive, she states "Economists define journalism as a 'public good' because the information in news stories informs wise decisions about important issues that can affect the quality of life of the na million residents. In the absence of a local news organization, social media

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and internet sites often have become the default media for reading, viewing and sharing news - as well as rumor and gossip - exacerbating political, social and economic divisions in a polarized nation."

The loss of local news also costs residents money. In "Financing Dies in Darkness? The Impact of Newspaper Closures on Public Finance," a 2018 research paper looking at the relationship between local news closures and public finance found that the cost of revenue and municipal bonds increased after a newspaper closure. "We wanted to show that, if you look at the municipal bond market, you can actually see the financial consequences that have to be borne by local citizens as a result of newspaper closures," said co-author Chang Lee, assistant professor of finance at the University of Illinois at Chicago. They also found increased government inefficiencies, such as in wages.

So what now? In Penelope Abernathy's The State of Local News, the 2022 Report," she states, "There is an urgent need to not only arrest the continuing decline in local newspapers, but also revive local journalism in those communities without it." This could take many forms, print or digital, for profit or non-profit, to name a few.

In the same 2022 report, citing an earlier report by Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism, Media, Integrated Marketing Communication, she says that from 2020-2022, the 64 new digital-only state and local news sites only slightly exceeded the number of sites that went dark. She goes on to say that in 2022, there were 545 digital-only state and local sites and that four out of ten local digital sites are now nonprofit, supported by a combination of grants, sponsorship and donations. Further stating that many newspapers and digital organizations are adapting and finding success, especially in larger markets or affluent communities, where there are more funding options.

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The team who created Winchester News believe that reviving local news, either digitally or in print, is an urgent need which should be undertaken and supported. It saves money, communities and democracy. In the same 2022 Report, Penelope Abernathy further states, “Strong local news helps us understand those whose experiences and attitudes are different from us, and, in the process, brings us together to solve our most pressing political, economic and social problems. It binds our vast nation of 330 million people together, nurturing both democracy and community. Everyone in the country has a stake in the future of local news, in whatever form it is delivered.”

Winchester News Group saw the costs and the urgent need to revive local news and has taken on that task. The Winchester News mission is to be a trusted and reliable source of local news. Our vision is to fill the information gap to increase civic participation and improve civil discourse. We aim to bring back accountability in hope of preventing government inefficiencies and aim to curb the crisis with our local democracy and community. We must build back the sense of community created by a local news source. Winchester News will be a community asset, but it must be supported and funded largely by the community.

Winchester News is not alone. Many local (and national) communities saw the same need and are answering the call. We are in good company with Bedford, Belmont, Brookline, Concord, Lexington, Marblehead and Newton to name a few. But, all of these outlets are looking to their community as a large source of funding to remain sustainable. Winchester News is no different.

Founding Donors will help us hire staff and launch our permanent website. Winchester News is looking to raise at least $100k to get off the ground. We will be applying for grants, both large and small, and looking to obtain some matching funds. But we need the community to show supp this endeavor, proving that it is something necessary for a successful and

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informed Winchester. Founding Donors, donating $5,000 or more, will be listed as such on the website (unless we are told otherwise). Of course, any donation is greatly appreciated and donors will be listed on a Thank You page of the website. Everyone has a stake in the future of local news. Please support Winchester News.

Tara Hughes is the president of the Board of Directors of Winchester News Group and a precinct 1 Town Meeting Member.

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Winchester School Committee candidates bring contrasting backgrounds to Thursday forum

Two candidates for Winchester's School Committee will face voters at a forum as the district navigates a new literacy curriculum, budget pressures and questions about student mental health. Heather von Mering and John Bellaire are competing for an open seat on the School Committee, which oversees a budget von

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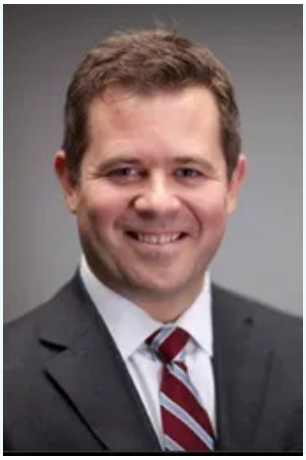

NEWS

Rep. Michael Day helps House colleagues pass sweeping energy affordability bill

The following was submitted by the Office of Rep. Michael S. Day: Rep. Michael S. Day and his colleagues in the House of Representatives recently passed energy affordability legislation that would result in over $9 billion in savings for utility ratepayers over the next 10 years. The bill maintains critical

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Winchester gun owners face new training rules starting April 2

Public safety data How Winchester compares on firearms licenses in comparable Massachusetts communities Active licenses as of Jan. 25, 2025 — Source: Massachusetts Criminal History Systems Board License to carry firearms Firearms identification card Winchester and Marblehead are the focus communities. Peers selected based on comparable population size, demographics and suburban

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Sen. Jason Lewis, Mass. Senate strengthen fair housing protections for renters, buyers

The following was submitted by the Office of Sen. Jason Lewis: State Sen. Jason Lewis joined his colleagues in the Massachusetts Senate to pass legislation that protects residents from discrimination in the housing market as the Trump administration abandons its enforcement of the federal Fair Housing Act. Illegal discrimination continues

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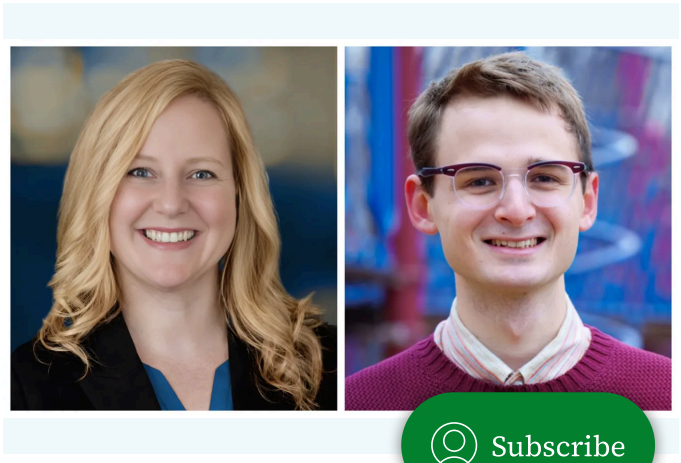

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Celebrate Women's History Month with Girls Leading Change

The following was submitted by the Network for Social Justice: To mark Women's History Month and International Women's Day in 2026, the Network for Social Justice is collaborating with club leaders from Winchester High School and members of the Community Health team from La Colaborativa in Chelsea and

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Winchester School Committee candidates bring contrasting backgrounds to Thursday forum

Two candidates for Winchester's School Committee will face voters at a forum as the district navigates a new literacy curriculum, budget pressures and questions about student mental health. Heather von Mering and John Bellaire are competing for an open seat on the School Committee, which oversees a budget von

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FEATURES

'Chicago: Teen Edition' dances onto the Winchester High School stage

By Talia Ho | Correspondent Fame. Fortune. And all that jazz. This spring, Winchester High School presents "Chicago: Teen Edition," a bold musical that explores celebrity culture, media manipulation, and the cost of ambition. This iconic production is set in the 1920s. Performances will take place on March 13 and 14

SPECIAL TO THE NEWS

March 4, 2026

RIPLEY PRESENTS
SYLDASON: YOU ARE WELCOME HERE
MARCH 13, 2026
7:30 PM
Sylvie Zakarian, marimba and Daniela Tosic, voice
Featuring folk and classical works by Gomidas,
Hovhaness, Minkin, Radan, Tantchev, and Tassone.
fcc-winchester.com/ripleychapel

EVENTS

Ripley Chapel in Winchester presents 'Syldason: You Are Welcome Here'

The following was submitted by the Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church: On Friday, March 13, beginning at 7:30 p.m., live in-person and live streamed from the stunning Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church, Winchester, 21 Church St., join in with Syldason, a duo concert featuring Sylvie Zakarian,

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